

## INCUMBENTS STARK, ESHOO, HONDA, LOFGREN AND FARR ARE TOP CANDIDATES

THE elections for Congress in and near Silicon Valley are not races so much as foregone conclusions.

In 2000, Democrats swept all the congressional seats in this region. Redistricting after the 2000 census further shackled Republican candidates.

In the absence of a startling upset, the Democratic incumbents will be returned to office on Nov. 5. Republicans are planning accordingly. They are allocating their money elsewhere, in races in which it might make a difference.

Local Republican officeholders in a position to entertain serious political aspirations have decided that this is not their year to run for Congress.

Uncontested races can lead to complacent incumbents, detached from their districts. But challengers need to prove they would be better, not just different.

This region has been capably represented in Congress. Its representatives, all Democrats, should be re-elected: Pete Stark, District 13, in the East Bay. Anna Eshoo, District 14, on the Peninsula. Mike Honda, District 15, and Zoe Lofgren, District 16, in central and eastern Santa Clara County. Sam Farr, District 17, southern Santa Cruz and Monterey and San Benito counties.

This group has proved its mettle in being skeptical about President Bush's plans to oust Saddam Hussein. Overall, it has been attentive to the desires of Silicon Valley, without being blind to its weaknesses.

These representatives have been strong voices against shortsighted, deficit building tax cuts, and regressive social policies on such issues as abortion.

Some of the opponents seem to have decided to run on a whim. Others -- Syed Mahmood running against Stark, and Linda Rae Hermann challenging Honda -- are serious and informed candidates, who have been active in their communities.

They lack the broader political base necessary to make the race a real contest. And they have not held any offices of larger scope, such as county supervisor or legislator, that most of the incumbents held before being elected to Congress.

For this part of California, Stark, Eshoo, Honda, Lofgren and Farr are the best candidates for Congress.

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Morgan Hill was victimized by redistricting when the drafters made it an isolated peninsula in the 11th District, which lies mostly in the Stockton area. The incumbent in this district is Republican Richard Pombo, with extreme anti-environmental views. He co-authored a book that links environmentalism to communism. The Democratic challenger, Elaine Shaw, espouses moderate Democratic positions and has raised a surprising amount of money. But she has no previous political experience. The Mercury News is not making

a recommendation in this race.

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